Saskatchewan
Parks and
Renewable
Resources

Hon. Colin Maxwell
Minister

Parks Branch

Blackstrap Provincial Park

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BLACKSTRAP PROVINCIAL

RECREATION PARK

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Background

In July 1960, recreation consultant W.M. Baker was commissioned by the South Saskatchewan River Development Commission to undertake a survey of the recreation potential of the proposed Blackstrap Reservoir. The Saskatoon South-East Water Supply System was being planned to supply water from Lake Diefenbaker to areas north and east for irrigation, industrial development, and municipal purposes.

Baker concluded that Blackstrap Reservoir would have very good recreation potential if the full supply levels could be maintained at elevations of 533.4 metres (1750 feet) or higher, creating a lake of approximately 1093 hectares (2700 acres), east of Highway 11. Boating, fishing, cottaging, camping and picnicking would be the most sought activities.

By early 1966 the Saskatchewan Water Supply Board had made a definite proposal to create Blackstrap Reservoir. Construction was undertaken in 1966 and 1967. When filled in 1968, the new reservoir was nearly 14.4 km (9 miles) long and .8 km (.5 mi) wide at a full supply level of 534.5 metres (1753.5 feet) above sea level.

The Blackstrap Recreation Site was officially established in 1968 on the east side of the reservoir.

When the Canada Winter Games were awarded to Saskatoon for February, 1971, a site was required for ski area capable of hosting downhill races, ski-jumping and cross-country skiing. Saskatoon proposed to build a "mountain" of sufficient vertical height. Many sites were investigated as to soil suitability and stability, but no acceptable site could be located along the North or South Saskatchewan River banks. The only suitable area found was within the area under development by the Department of Natural Resources at Blackstrap Reservoir. Land was purchased for the "mountain" and construction began in 1969, was completed in the summer of 1970.

The Department of Natural Resources was to be responsible for continuous operation of the ski facility following completion of the 1971 Winter Games. Major problems had to be overcome after the Games including: overcrowding of lift lines and the daylodge; the upper part of the mountain was too steep for the majority of recreational skiers; snowmaking equipment was inadequate; and icing of the slopes occurred due to lack of wind protection.

Over the past ten years the majority of these problems have been overcome and many improvements have been made including: improvements to the daylodge, improved snow grooming and snowmaking equipment, additional lift capacity (triple chair lift) and recontouring and expansion of downhill slopes.

Blackstrap Provincial Recreation Park was established in 1986 through the reclassification of the Recreation Site. The Provincial Park will offer a variety of quality recreational opportunities, particularly with improved facilities, programming and access.

Park Classification and Purpose

One of the major provisions of the Parks Act is to identify a classification of Provincial Parks. Four classes of Provincial Parks are now identified: Wilderness Parks; Natural Environment Parks; Recreation Parks and Historic Parks. As a Recreation Park, Blackstrap will be developed and used in a manner distinctly different from the other three classes of Provincial Parks. Typically, the purpose of all Recreation Parks is to provide a variety of high quality recreational opportunities and facilities primarily within close proximity of major population concentrations.

The primary purpose of the Blackstrap Provincial Park will be to provide high quality year-round recreational opportunities in the Saskatoon region. The focus will be on development of facilities to support a wide range of intensive recreational activities in an attractive natural setting. Blackstrap Provincial Park will utilize most of its area and variety of resources to encourage the widest possible segment of the public to come to the park and to experience and enjoy the out-of-doors.

Blackstrap will complement the Provincial Parks system by providing an excellent downhill skiing facility in the Saskatoon region. The man-made mountain is the only one of its kind in the province.

Location and Size

Blackstrap Provincial Park is located along the south-east shore of Blackstrap Lake some 40 km (25 miles) south of Saskatoon. The area is situated east of Highway #11, the main traffic route between Regina and Saskatoon, and can be reached by paved Highway 211 which joins Highway #11 at Dundurn. Access to the east side of the lake is by a causeway near the middle of the lake. The recreation facilities are situated linearly along the internal park road with day use picnicking, parking and services furthest north. The campground is located furthest south, visible from Highway #11 on the opposite side of the lake. The man-made mountain is the most prominent feature visible for miles due to its 46 metre (150 foot) elevation above the prairie landscape.

Access to the Park is possible from the south in the summer season. A farm access road which forms part of the eastern boundary connects to Highway #11 two miles south and one-half mile west of the south-east corner of the park.

The Park is approximately 656 ha (1620 acres) in size extending from the south boundary of section 11, Township 32, Range 4, West of the 3rd Meridian to the causeway in the North West quarter of Section 31, Township 32, Range 3, West of the 3rd Meridian.

Natural Features

As the continental glaciers advanced southwestward through the Saskatoon region, they eroded the bedrock deposits and diverted drainage from northeast to southeast. Up to 800 feet of glacial sediments were deposited during at least five episodes of glaciation. The last glacier retreated between 14,000 and 12,000 years ago.

Blackstrap Lake owes its origin to the last deglaciation processes. According to geologist E.A. Christiansen, meltwater drained from Lake Saskatchewan (which was lying along the ice margin to the west and north of the Blackstrap Coulee), northeast through the Blackstrap Coulee, the lake north of the Allan Hills, the Lewis Spillway, Glacial Lake Mountain Lake and then through the Last Mountain, Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine Spillways into Glacial Lake Agassiz in Manitoba.

A subsequent readvance of the glacier closed the drainage through the Blackstrap Coulee, raising the level of Lake Saskatchewan to such an extent that it again overflowed southward into the South Saskatchewan and Qu'Appelle Spillways. With the final retreat of the glacier from the region, Blackstrap Coulee was left as a significant topographic feature. The flow of meltwater through the spillway formed a relatively smooth but steep sided valley with limited terracing. Wind and water erosion and deposition have further tended to smooth these surficial features over the past 12,500 years.

Blackstrap Lake, at an elevation of 534.4 metres (1,753 feet), lies 15 to 30 metres below the upland to the west, but considerably lower relative to the Allan Hills on the east. The lake is confined within the glacial spillway by dams at both its north and south ends.

Due to the drainage off the higher Allan Hills to the east, a number of small coulees and steep sided ravines eroded into the till plains along the eastern side of the former spillway. The majority of these ravines within the park area extend less than one half a mile from the lake.

The climate of the area is characterized by warm summers with wide variations in day and night time temperatures, long cold winters and moderately-low precipitation. The mean daily temperature in July is 18.9 degrees C (66 degrees F) and the mean daily temperature in January is -16.4 degrees C (2.4 degrees F). Winds average 17 km/h prevailing from the north-northwest and southwest. The average annual precipitation is 36 cm. (14.5 inches) with the majority occurring during the growing season. Snowfall averages 105 cm (42.1") being measurable on an average of only 33 days per year. Snowmaking is essential to the successful operation of the ski facility due to the lack of natural snowfall.

Natural vegetation consists of mixed grass prairie species with aspen parkland vegetation spreading out from the more sheltered tributary coulees and ravines. Tree species are primarily aspen poplar but a variety of low brush type species exist (rose, alder, chokecherry, saskatoon, dogwood, hawthorn).

Conditions in Blackstrap Reservoir are favourable for establishing or maintaining fish populations. Game species now present include walleye, northern pike, whitefish and goldeye. Blackstrap is stocked regularly with walleye. A 1984 fisheries survey found an excellent population of walleye and a fair population of northern pike and whitefish. Several large whitefish were recorded in an earlier survey.

The water quality of Blackstrap Lake is conducive to water-based activities including swimming, boating, sailing and water skiing. Growth of algae has been evident in late weeks of the summer recreation season, but aquatic activities are generally not curtailed.

The Provincial Park with its natural vegetation of grasslands and wooded coulees, provides good habitat and refuge for wildlife in the region.

Wildlife species characteristic of the area include cotton tail rabbit, jack rabbit, ground squirrel, porcupine, striped skunk, raccoon, coyote, sharp-tailed grouse and white tailed deer. A variety of shore and water birds are also evident and the reservoir serves some migrating species. The lake is used as a staging area for ducks and geese in fall and provides good opportunities for viewing such waterfowl. Opportunities also exist in the spring to view migrating song birds along the wooded valley slopes.

Recreational Features

Blackstrap Provincial Park's primary features are both man-made; the "mountain" ski hill and the reservoir in the old glacial spillway. The mountain is unique to the province and the closest ski facility to the Saskatoon market. With continued improvement to the skiing facilities since construction, Blackstrap Mountain has attained a very good reputation.

In winter, there is only one significant activity zone--the 'mountain' and immediate vicinity where all support facilities are located (lodge, lifts, parking). The remainder of the park remains mainly unused except for cross-country skiing along designated trails and in some of the more sheltered areas of the valley hillsides.

As a summer day-use and camping area, Blackstrap has considerable undeveloped potential for more use. The lake is attractive for boating, but sport fishing has not reached original expectations.

Much of the area within the park is steep grassed hillsides or ravines with dense brush and tree cover. These steep slopes provide an attractive natural setting for recreational activities. Sites most suitable for intensive day-use activities are generally restricted to a narrow strip of land between the shoreline and the toe of the valley walls.

From a "use" or development viewpoint the linear park may be considered to have two units in the summer season: the day-use area in the northern half and the camping area in the southern half.

Access to the existing campground and the south end of the park is restricted to the municipal road on the upland. The campground is operated as a self-registration facility.

Recreational Use

Use of the Provincial Park occurs during both summer and winter months. Traditional day-use activities associated with the lake include picnicking, camping, swimming, and boating. Downhill skiing on the 'mountain' is the primary use of the area in winter, although cross-country skiing, tobogganing and snowmobiling are evident.

Although fluctuating annually, overall use of Blackstrap facilities has increased over the past number of years. The number of vehicles entering in summer increased from 10,526 in 1980 to 14,569 in 1985, increase of 37 percent.

Between 1980 and 1985 the number of daily ski permits increased from 8,482 to 17,779, an increase of 109 percent. During this same five year period seasonal ski permits increased from 452 to 1,278, an increase of over 200 percent. Continued growth in this activity is expected following the improvements (chair lift) made in 1985.

Campground use at Blackstrap Lake has been disappointing, peaking at 2,514 camper-days in 1980. The average length of stay has been 1.1 days for the average camping group of 3.4 persons. This suggests that Blackstrap is used as an overnight stop rather than a destination.

While more visitors are purchasing entry and seasonal permits to use Blackstrap, fewer and fewer seem to be enjoying the camping experience. As a new Provincial Park, Blackstrap's campgrounds can be improved to encourage more campers to come and stay longer.

Available Facilities

Existing facilities in the park include the following: boat launches and docking facilities; 150 meter swimming beach with bath/change facilities; sixty unserviced campsites and a group camping area; playgrounds and ball diamonds; fish cleaning tables; picnic grounds/day-use areas (225 tables, 195 barbecues); 5 km of cross-country ski trails; administration office, park entry office and maintenance compound; major downhill ski facility, including chair and T-bar lifts, day lodge, snow making and snow grooming equipment, rentals, food services and parking areas.

Benefits of the Provincial Park

Designation as a Provincial Recreation Park will bring about improved facilities, programming and promotion. There will be continued outdoor recreation benefits to the Saskatoon region, particularly for camping and those day-use activities already identified. Interpretive nature trails, suitable viewpoint displays and other facilities could interpret the geologic history and physical environment of Blackstrap Lake. Improved access and continued development of facilities and resources would benefit users in summer and winter.

Low and declining use of the area for camping not only requires facilities and services such as electricity, modern washrooms, showers and laundry, but the camping area itself needs to be attractive and sheltered from the hot sun and prevalent winds. Accessibility to other day-use activity areas is also desirable to increase use and enjoyment of the recreational resources by campers.

Recreational use of the lake for aquatic purposes has been limited more by the level of on-shore facility development and programming than by the resource base itself. For the most part, the valley sides and particularly the resources of the southern half of the entire park area have been used very little, in summer or in winter.

Blackstrap is gaining in popularity for winter recreation beyond the immediate Saskatoon market area. As a tourist attraction the "mountain" will continue to be of interest but the developed resources will not constitute a major tourist attraction or destination area in the region. In summer, tourists may visit the park for a short time while passing through the area, but the primary role of the park will be as a day use area for the growing Saskatoon market.

Designation as a Provincial Park will improve Blackstrap's status relative to other competing day-use areas in the Saskatoon region, particularly Pike Lake Provincial Park, and help to relieve over-crowding and congestion at that park.

Figure 1: Regional Perspective

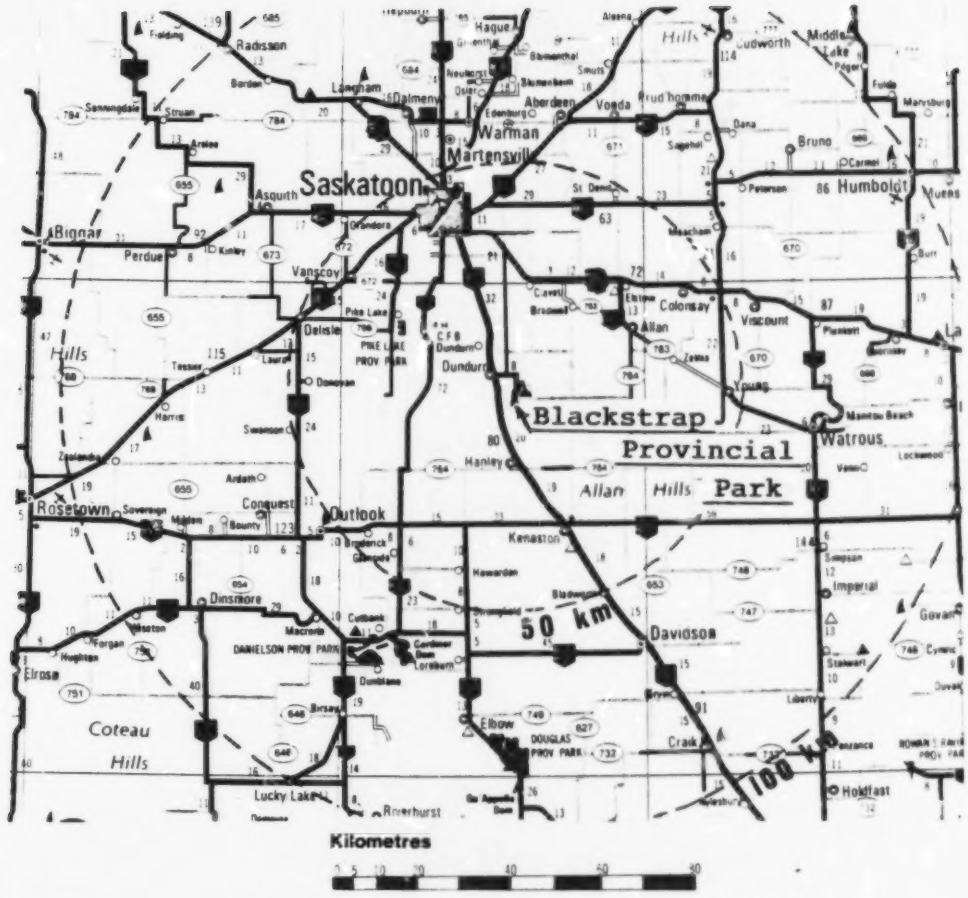

Figure 2: Size of Park